

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Six graders get chance to explore their river

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Each year, late in the spring, I get an invitation from the 6th grade teachers at East Yancey Middle School to join their students at Black Mountain Campground, just downhill from Mount Mitchell.

The students don waders, grab a net and we wade the South Toe River, looking for crayfish, mayflies, and other creepy crawlies living in the stream. Officially tasked with identifying the animals they find and determining what their presence says about the quality of the stream, I feel certain that what the kids took home wasn't an understanding of the water quality requirements of a stonefly, but memories of the day they went to school and were allowed to get wet and explore a river.

And that's great. What begins as a fun afternoon in the 6th grade can become participating in a river clean-up by 11th grade. It can become a decision to study chemistry to help streams stay clean, or lead someone to get involved in local government to ensure their community's natural resources are conserved.

It doesn't take a Fish & Wildlife Service biologist to get kids in a river. As we enter into the heat of summer, I invite you to take your kids to play in a river, to feel the cold water envelop their feet, to look under rocks for crayfish, and to create the memories that will help shape who they become.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.